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# "WE MODERNIZED 'ER, B'Y!": THE MODERN, MODERNE, AND POST-MODERNITY IN NEWFOUNDLAND ARCHITECTURE.

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The popular view of Newfoundland and Labrador outside of the province is largely that of old, quaint fishing villages, wreathed in fog, and populated almost exclusively by grizzled old men and aggressively happy fiddle-playing youths, an image enthusiastically exported by Newfoundland's Department of Tourism and Culture. Less picturesquely, there has persisted on the mainland the idea that Newfoundland is backwards, isolated, and insular. The architecture of Newfoundland is often portrayed as being part of this tradition, with ancient tilts, stages, flakes and mediaeval house forms still being constructed. It is true that Newfoundland is one of the best places in Canada to study vernacular forms of housing, with eighteenth century traditional Irish peasant houses still to found, even close to the heart of downtown St. John's.

Yet geographic distance, political newness to the Dominion of Canada, and the retention of a distinct society, folklore, and language do not equal artistic ignorance or stagnation. Builders in Newfoundland have always been ready to exploit the latest technology and to follow the most current architectural mode.

A good starting point for this argument is the oldest dateable building in the province. The Moravian Church mission house in Hopedale, Labrador, was built in 1782, and is not only the oldest building in the province for which a construction date can be historically verified, it is also the oldest timber frame building in Canada east of Quebec. While unimpressive looking, the entire building was prefabricated in Europe and shipped in pieces to Labrador. The surrounding complex is even more architecturally impressive. Multi-storied half-timber frame buildings, these structures were also prefabricated and shipped in numbered pieces to their present location. Erected with the best available German woodworking technologies they feature intricately designed roof support systems. The entire second floor of the church hangs in suspension from the rafters, creating a first floor space completely free of internal supports or pillars, infusing the space with light.

The vast majority of buildings constructed in the province have been made of wood, and fire has always been a great problem. St. John's Great Fire of 1892 destroyed almost all of the city. The merchants and property owners used the opportunity to rebuild the town using the Second Empire Style on a massive scale. The style originated in France under Napoleon III. Introduced to the island circa 1885, much of downtown St. John's was rebuilt in the style, which quickly spread across the island. It is marked by the use of curved dormers and a Mansard roof, a double sloped roof shape named after French architect François Mansart.

As styles developed in Europe and North America, Newfoundlanders were quick to follow suit. One interesting buildings is Apothecary Hall, designed in 1922 by John E. Hoskins. The building is an Art Nouveau and Art Deco amalgamation. The store "appears to have direct European architectural influence... almost reminiscent of the Charles Rennie MacKintosh restrained (celtic) variation of Art Nouveau" (Apothecary n.pag). The second floor features two well-designed fireplaces, one in Art Nouveau, the other of Bauhaus design.

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Art Moderne, a later thrust of the same movement that produced Art Deco, was introduced to Atlantic Canada circa 1930-1940. Influenced by the same cubist drive that produced the work of Picasso, Moderne architecture featured a flat roof to wall connection, strips of glass block, and corner windows (Penney 106-7). Sometimes expensive to construct, Art Moderne houses can still be found across the island.

One of the best examples of how styles and concepts of architectural modernity have changed is Victoria Hall, the Loyal Orange Lodge on Gower Street, St. John's. Historically, the Orangemen have held considerable power in Newfoundland. In 1883, tension between Orange supporters and Catholics in Harbour Grace resulted in five fatalities and a dozen wounded at a July 12th Orangemen's parade (Colbourne and Konrad 383). The Leeming Loyal Orange Lodge was formed in St. John's on October 12th, 1868 (Baker). They dedicated their first home on May 24, 1884 (Evening n.pag), which was unfortunately destroyed in the Great Fire of 1892.

It was decided that the new Victoria Hall would be 50' square with a stone basement wall (Baker). The stone was already in place, "the only feature to have survived the Great Fire" (Esthetic 24). The new Hall was designed by a Mr. Whitehead and was dedicated on April 25th, 1895 (Victoria, n.pag.). The rebuilt Hall "exhibited many of the late-Victorian architectural features employed in rebuilding the city" (Guilan 53). In terms of style the building is best described as "Late Victorian Eclectic", a style popular in Eastern Canada from circa 1880-1915 and typified by "its complexity, both in stylistic allusions and formal juxtapositions" (Penney 90-1). One journalist wrote of Victoria Hall, "the cornices and corner pilasters are simple... and very much in keeping with the classical tradition. The... ornate cast-iron railing at the edge of the roof... is gothic in character, with typical foliage crockets and a stylized fleur-de-lis pattern" (Hicks n.d., E1). At its construction it was among the more modern in the city, including a thoroughly up-to-date heating apparatus installed by local entrepreneur W. G. Pippy (Victoria, n.pag.).

The period after the second world war saw a decrease in the fortunes of Victoria Hall. In the early 1960's, a number of modifications were made. The main hall was boarded up (Replica 38) and "in an attempt to reduce heating costs, the Society replaced the bay and arch windows with double glazed units... [and] removed the tower" (William n.pag.). According to Fred Baker, Secretary/Treasurer and Senior Member of Leeming Lodge, the original tower was removed when concerns were raised that, due to its age, it might blow down in heavy winds (Baker). When John McNeill, a local developer, asked one of the involved Orangemen why they had done it, the man replied, "We modernized 'er, b'y!" (McNeill).

In 1981, Victoria Hall was found to not meet safety standards. The trustees could not afford the renovations, Victoria Hall was put up for sale, and on May 5th, 1983 the Leeming Lodge held their last meeting in the building (Baker). The property was bought by John McNeill, who in turn hired architect William MacCallum to "produce some schemes for turning the hall into offices" (Hicks 1984, 28). MacCallum undertook the building's metamorphosis, overseeing a team that put period photographs under the magnifying glass to pick out missing architectural details. By 1984, the tower and original windows were replaced and modifications made to the building's interior.

The Southcott Award for architects was presented to Bill MacCallum by the Newfoundland Historic Trust in 1984 (Thorburn 1), and the building won an honourable mention in the 1985 Credit Foncier Building Preservation program (Replica 38; Guilan 53), created to reward proper restoration and renovation (Esthetic 25). Renovation has been defined as "bringing [a building] up to date according to building codes and to notions of modern convenience", while restoration has been defined as returning the building "to the

original appearance or character" (Jones 327). What happened with Victoria Hall lies somewhere in the middle of these two definitions.

The 1960's saw the tower and oriel windows "replaced with a flat roofline and rectangular modern windows" (Hicks 1984, 28), attempts to cut down on heating costs and make the building fit "notions of modern convenience" (Jones 327). But while the 1960's renovations were motivated by financial concerns, the manner in which the renovations were done was an example of aesthetic concerns. The renovations were carried out under the name of modernization (McNeill; and Replica 38). The trim roofline and rectangular windows were as much a result of a desire for the latest "style" as they were of a desire for better heat retention. "We modernized (Eer, b'y!" claimed the old Orangeman, and indeed Victoria Hall was converted to the closest resemblance of a New International Style office building as any wooden 19th century Victorian lodge ever could be.

One of the developer's objectives in 1984 was "to show that heritage or historic properties... can be saved, rehabilitated and put to economical and viable use" (William n.pag.). The financial concerns of the developer had an interesting impact on both the historical authenticity of the building, and the way in which the entire restoration process was packaged and sold to the public. Consider the following quote from *Newfoundland Lifestyle*: "The building has been upgraded and has increased its office space without any sacrifice to the original interior" (Esthetic 25). One is left to wonder if the author had any knowledge of the building before the reconstruction, as the interior was almost completely redesigned. A new ceiling cuts the main lodge room in half horizontally, creating two floors where one existed. Unpainted mouldings have been painted in vibrant colours which owe more to Martha Stewart than to any historical actuality. An entirely new staircase leads to an entirely new penthouse added to the top of the building. And when I asked the architect why double entrances had been replaced with one central entrance and staircase, he told me that he was sure this was the way it would have been originally, conveniently ignoring the existence of historical photographs, architectural drawings, and newspaper accounts.

The reconstructed Victoria Hall serves more to illustrate how the present views the past than it does to serve as an accurate illustration of late nineteenth century architecture, proving the fluidity of aesthetics. It shows "we often act, even today, as if our own aesthetic criteria were absolutely valid instead of being, as is indeed the case, absolutely relative" (Fitch 8). As Kevin Lynch writes, "our images of past and future are present images, continuously re-created" (65). The modern developer, architects, journalists, and the heritage preservation movement have worked to fabricate a model of history "as it should be".

Regardless of its post-structural or heritage-related implications, it is still a beautiful building, and the continuously reinvented Victoria Hall is very much a part of Newfoundland's acceptance of the innovative. It is also part of a growing pattern of modern "heritage-style" architecture in the province. Much of the infill housing in the downtown area of St. John's has been created to reflect the styles of architecture popular one hundred years ago. Modernity has come to be represented in some part by these entirely new (re:)constructions.

Over Christmas, I was asked during a conversation with a visiting artist and musician from Halifax whether there was any modern architecture in Newfoundland. Certainly there are no Moriyama and Teshima designed shoe museums in Lower Lance Cove nor are there any steel web suspended roof hotels in Topsail, but the lack of this type of building in Newfoundland is the result of a severely depressed local economy rather than intellectual provincialism. Like any modern city, the skyline of St. John's sports the now

ubiquitous Bauhaus and New International Style influenced steel silhouettes. It is appropriate that several of the more unique examples of modern architecture in Newfoundland mirror the province's historical links to the sea. One good example is the sea anemone-shaped Marine Science Research Laboratory at Logy Bay designed by Sir Christopher Barlow and built by Seaboard Construction (Marine 12). The research facility has been described as "a four-storey mushroom shaped dodecahedron" (Anstey 19).

Just as oddly-shaped is the Hibernia Management and Development Company's Gravity Base Structure, or GBS. Constructed in Bull Arm, Trinity Bay, it is the only offshore drilling platform of its kind in the world, and among its architectural features are 16 teeth designed "to absorb the impact of icebergs up to 6 million tonnes" (Hibernia 31). With a height of 111 metres, the construction of the GBS used 95,000 tonnes of reinforcing steel and 350,000 tonnes of concrete (Last 16). It is the largest floating structure ever built.

A structure that used much less concrete is the building originally created as the Yugoslav Pavilion for Expo 67, and designed by architect Miroslav Pesic (Expo 120). "In return for helping a Yugoslavian plane in trouble, Joey Smallwood finagled to get the Yugoslavian pavilion at Expo for permanent display in Newfoundland" (Down 11). The building was dismantled and shipped in pieces to the island, and is currently home to the Seaman's Museum in Grand Bank, Fortune Bay.

In his book *Supermannerism: New Attitudes in Post-Modern Architecture*, C. Ray Smith argues that the preservation and recycling of old buildings and found space marks a distinct change from the ideas of the Modernists (246). The post-modern movement in architecture has encouraged eclecticism, favouring hybrid elements and messy vitality over obvious unity (Fleming et al. 347), juxtaposition of colour (Penney 138) and involving a reversion to pre-modern visual values (Crook 267).

It is perhaps fitting that the builders who will define post-modern architecture in Newfoundland are not necessarily trained architects. Hybridization, juxtaposition of colour, messy vitality: these elements are the hallmarks of much of Newfoundland's folk architecture, architecture like the George Clarke House in Baine Harbour. The George Clarke House, like the Seaman's Museum, is part of the province's rich history of transporting buildings. This house was floated from its original site in Port Elizabeth, part of the province's resettlement program after Confederation.

Old Fred Norman's House in Rushoon, a folk art interpretation of the Second Empire style, is another living example of how houses continue to be built, modified, recycled, and modernized in Newfoundland. It too has been hauled a considerable distance to its current resting place. The poster designed for Heritage Canada's Heritage Day held on February 17, 1996 features the print "Hauling Job Sturge's House" by Newfoundland artist David Blackwood (Heritage 8-9), and depicts a house being pulled across the ice using block and tackle, one of the more impressive acts of home improvement. Resettlement is a common theme in Blackwood's art. In true post-modern fashion, the acts of modernization and traditional practice are juxtaposed. The chosen image for Canada's Heritage Day is ultimately constructionist, with the past being (re:)invented in the present. If Job Sturge's Heritage Canada house was to apply for designation as a Registered Heritage Structure, its application would most likely be turned down, since the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador favours structures for designation that have not been relocated in recent memory.

To bring this paper full circle, I wanted to end with the Murphy Cabin, Antone's Point, Labrador. Designed and constructed over the past four years, the Murphy

Cabin offers a glimpse at vernacular post-modernism: architectural design after modernism without design magazine glossiness. It also provides a link between the oldest buildings and the newest buildings in the province. Located near Zoar Bay, the site of an abandoned Moravian mission station, the cabin features windows recycled from an old Moravian school. The windows have been rotated ninety degrees and placed end to end, creating a long band of light on one side of the structure. This is an obvious shift from earlier window proportions, and is, in itself, another identified element of post-modern design (Penney 139).

A friend who grew up on St-John's South Side, a descendant of one of Newfoundland's successful sealing captains, once told me "Newfoundlanders are modernists". In a sociological sense rather than a strict architectural one there is an element of truth to this statement, a truth sometimes frustrating to heritage preservationists. It is visible in the province-wide love of vinyl siding, casement windows, and prefab aluminum chimneys. It is shown by a willingness to accept the future, and by the past being (re:)invented in the present.

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